

Department of Human Services statement to 7.30.

Response

- The department assists people facing difficult situations every day and always considers any special circumstances.
- We always put people at the centre of our work and provide a service that is sensitive to individual needs and life events.
 - We balance the specific sensitivities of working with people who have an existing vulnerability and the obligation to ensure that people have been paid the right amount for their circumstances.
- There is a designated team which is always available to help people experiencing difficulties or with concerns about their review.
 - This is why all correspondence includes a dedicated phone line available for people to call if they need additional support and advice. Any person suffering hardship, or distress, can at any time seek assistance from the department, which can connect them with support staff such as a social worker.
- The department regularly looks closely at sensitive cases to see what could have been done better and to provide any additional support if required.
 - The majority of online compliance reviews apply to people who've earned income while receiving income support payments like Newstart and Youth Allowance. Age and Disability Support Pension make-up a small proportion of these reviews.
 - We have proactively sought regular feedback from more than 35 organisations about the design of our income compliance processes.
- People who do not want to respond to a review letter online can ask a staff member to help update their employment income over the phone. All our letters include a dedicated phone line available for people to call.
- The Commonwealth Ombudsman's 2019 report acknowledged the significant improvements we have made to our processes, and confirmed the work we have done to support vulnerable customers has met their 2017 recommendations.
 - The Ombudsman's report also shows we have significantly improved the way we communicate with people to ensure they better understand the way debts are calculated and have greater access to support if they wish to have a debt reviewed.